

R 170753Z APR 90
FM AMCONSUL MADRAS
TO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
SECSTATE WASHDC 2418
INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY LONDON
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRAS 01249

LONDON FOR MILLIKEN; CINCPAC ALSO FOR FPA

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR

TAGS: PGOV PREL PREF IN CE

SUBJECT: KARUNANIDHI: IS THE TAMIL NADU CHIEF MINISTER BECOMING THE LTTE'S ELDER STATESMAN?

¶1. C - ENTIRE TEXT

¶2. SUMMARY: CHIEF MINISTER KARUNANIDHI'S OBVIOUS TILT TOWARDS THE LTTE IS GENERATING WIDESPREAD CONTROVERSY AND DISMAY IN TAMIL NADU, PARTICULARLY IN LIGHT OF THE DMK LEADER'S STRAINED RELATIONS WITH THE TIGERS IN THE PAST. SINCE DECEMBER, AND ESPECIALLY IN THE LAST TWO MONTHS, THE CHIEF MINISTER HAS GONE OUT OF HIS WAY TO DEMONSTRATE HIS COMMITMENT TO THE TIGERS -- AT WHAT WOULD APPEAR TO BE SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL COST. NO POLITICAL FIGURE HERE, LEAST OF ALL FROM THE DMK, CAN EXPLAIN TO ANYONE'S SATISFACTION THE GAMEBOOK KARUNANIDHI IS USING. AS HE BECOMES MORE AND MORE OF A "TAMIL EELAM HARDLINER", SOME MAY FEEL HE IS BURNING BRIDGES WITH DELHI. WE ARE AT PRESENT BAFFLED.

END SUMMARY

¶3. TAMIL NADU CHIEF MINISTER KARUNANIDHI'S SUDDEN AND COMPLETE IDENTIFICATION WITH THE LTTE IS GENERATING STRONG POLITICAL CONTROVERSY IN THE STATE. RECENT EVIDENCE OF HIS TILT IN FAVOR OF THE TIGERS ABOUNDS: HIS KIND WORDS FOR LTTE HOSPITALITY AFTER THEIR ABDUCTION OF TAMIL NADU FISHERMEN ALLEGEDLY IN SRI LANKAN WATERS AND HIS PRAISE FOR THE LTTE FOR "PROTECTING" A SECOND GROUP OF FISHERMEN "CAPTURED" BY THE SRI LANKAN NAVY, HIS REFUSAL TO PERMIT TAMIL REFUGEES ASSOCIATED WITH OTHER MILITANT GROUPS TO LAND IN THE STATE, AND HIS BLATANT REFUSAL TO ATTEND AN IPKF WELCOME RECEPTION IN MADRAS MARCH 25 (MADRAS 1034). SOME OBSERVERS FEEL THERE MAY BE A DEEPER DESIGN TO THE CHIEF MINISTER'S PRO-LTTE STANCE.

¶4. THE CONTROVERSY HAS SPREAD TO THE FLOOR OF THE TAMIL NADU LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY- CONGRESS(I) MLA'S, ALONG WITH THEIR AIADMK ALLIES, CHALLENGED THE CHIEF MINISTER'S PATRIOTISM FOR NOT ATTENDING LAST MONTH'S IPKF RECEPTION AND HIS CRITICISM OF THE BEHAVIOR OF THE IPKF, AND FOLLOWED THEIR HARSH WORDS WITH A WALKOUT BY ALL CONGRESS AND AIADMK MLA'S. THE LOCAL PRESS JOINED THE FRAY BY ALMOST UNIVERSALLY CRITICIZING THE CHIEF MINISTER'S BEHAVIOR TOWARDS THE IPKF JAWANS. EVEN THE DMK'S OWN ALLIES, SUCH AS CPI(M) MLA K. RAMANI, TOOK EXCEPTION TO THE CHIEF MINISTER'S INSULT TO THE INDIAN ARMY.

¶5. FEW PUNDITS WOULD ARGUE THAT THE MACHIAVELLIAN KARUNANIDHI DISPLAYS RELUCTANCE TO CHANGE SIDES WHEN POLITICAL EXPEDIENCY DICTATES. HOWEVER, HIS CURRENT KIND WORDS FOR AND BLATANT SUPPORT IN FAVOR OF THE LTTE APPEAR TO BAFFLE THE DMK'S PARTNER, JANATA DAL, AS WELL AS THE ADVERSARY CONGRESS(I). UPON REGAINING POWER IN JANUARY 1989, KARUNANIDHI COOPERATED WITH DELHI, MET ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS WITH RAJIV GANDHI AND REFRAINED FROM ANY OVERT CRITICISM OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S SRI LANKAN POLICIES. WHEN THE NEWLY ELECTED NATIONAL FRONT GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED ITS INTENTION TO WITHDRAW THE IPKF BY MARCH 31, KARUNANIDHI INSISTED THAT A PACT AMONG THE RIVAL TAMIL MILITANT GROUPS BE PURSUED.

FOR ALMOST THREE MONTHS, HE ENGAGED IN FRUITLESS
MEDIATION TALKS TO THIS END.

¶16. THE LTTE HAD NEVER BEEN KARUNANIDHI'S FAVORITE SRI LANKAN TAMIL MILITANT GROUP, PRINCIPALLY BECAUSE OF THEIR CLOSE TIES WITH HIS ARCH-RIVAL, THE LATE M.G. RAMACHANDRAN IN FACT HIS DISDAIN FOR THE GROUP WAS MANIFESTED OFTEN IN THE PAST. HOWEVER, WHEN THE DMK CAME BACK TO POWER, THE LTTE MADE OVERTURES TO THE NEW TAMIL NADU GOVERNMENT, TO WHICH THEY RECEIVED LITTLE RESPONSE. ONCE THE MEDIATTION TALKS BEGAN IN DECEMBER, AND SPECIFICALLY DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE LTTE'S ANTON BALA-SINGHAM AND KARUNANIDHI, THE CHIEF MINISTER CHOSE TO IGNORE THE OTHER GROUPS, ADVISING THEM TO BURY THEIR DIFFERENCES WITH THE LTTE AND SUPPORT THEIR OBVIOUS POWER POSITION AND ASSIST IN DEVELOPING A VIABLE TAMIL POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT. EPRLF LEADERS, INCLUDING TAMIL PROVINCE CHIEF MINISTER VARADARAJA PERUMAL, ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE COMPLAINED TO THE GOI THAT KARUNANIDHI HAD TURNED PARTIAL.

¶17. HARD EVIDENCE OF THE CHIEF MINISTER'S CHANGE OF HEART TOWARDS THE LTTE EMERGED AT THE FEBRUARY DMK STATE CONFERENCE IN TRICHY. WITH HIS NEPHEW, UNION MINISTER MURASOLI MARAN, PRESENT ON THE DAIS, KARUNANIDHI HIMSELF READ OUT THE PARTY'S RESOLUTION WHICH ENDORSED THE LTTE'S BRAVE AND SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE AGAINST THE INDIAN ARMY.

¶18. COMMENT: WHAT LIES BEHIND THE CHIEF MINISTER'S PUZZLING VOLTA FACE? EVEN SOME DMK COLLEAGUES HAVE CONFESSED TO CONSULATE REPS THAT THEY HAVE NO IDEA, ALTHOUGH VARIOUS THEORIES ARE BEING DISCUSSED IN COFFEE HOUSES, NEWSPAPER OFFICES AND PARTY HEADQUARTERS. WHILE ALL AGREE THAT IT WOULD BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE FOR KARUNANIDHI TO CONTINUE OVERT SUPPORT FOR THE SEVERAL LOSERS AMONG THE SRI LANKAN TAMIL POLITICAL GROUPS, HIS ENERGETIC AND UNWAVERING AND TOTALLY UNCRITICAL AGREEMENT WITH THE LTTE'S EVERY MOVE IS RAISING NUMEROUS EYEBROWS, AND ALIENATING MEMBERS OF HIS OWN PARTY.

¶19. ONE EXTREME VIEW, TO WHICH WE DO NOT SUBSCRIBE, IS THAT KARUNANIDHI IS INTERESTED IN A TAMIL EELAM VARIANT FOR HIS INDIAN STATE. ANOTHER, PERHAPS MORE CREDIBLE THEORY, IS THAT THE LTTE HAS THREATENED KARUNANIDHI WITH A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN THE LEVEL OF MILITANT VIOLENCE IN TAMIL NADU, ENOUGH PERHAPS TO LEAD TO THE IMPOSITION OF PRESIDENT'S RULE, IF HE DOESN'T BOOST THEIR CAUSE. OTHERS POINT OUT THAT THE CHIEF MINISTER, THOUGH A CHARTER MEMBER, WAS NEVER AN ENTHUSIASTIC ADHERENT OF THE NATIONAL FRONT (AND IN FACT JUST ABSENTED HIMSELF FROM THE NATIONAL INTEGRATION COUNCIL SESSION IN DELHI) AND MAY BE CARVING OUT A PLACE WHERE HE CAN POSITION HIMSELF IN A POST VP SINGH WORLD. STILL OTHER LOCAL INTERLOCUTORS POINT TO HIS INCREASING WITHDRAWAL FROM PERSONAL CONTACT (NO PRIVATE PRESS INTERVIEWS AND FEW ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS) AND CONCLUDE HE IS LOSING HIS ONCE FIRM AND CANNY GRIP ON TAMIL NADU POLITICAL LIFE. THERE ARE ALSO THOSE WHO CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT HE SINCELY DEDICATED HIMSELF TO THE EARLIER NEGOTIATIONS, WANTS TO BRING ABOUT REAL PEACE AMONG THE SRI LANKAN TAMILS, AND BELIEVES THAT HE CAN ONLY POSITION HIMSELF TO RESUME THESE DISCUSSIONS IF HIS CREDIBILITY WITH THE MOST IMPORTANT PLAYER -- THE LTTE -- IS UNQUESTIONED.

¶10. WE QUICKLY ADMIT THAT WE DON'T KNOW THE ANSWERS. HOWEVER, WE DO NOT BELIEVE KARUNANIDHI IS CRACKING UP NOR DO WE THINK THAT HE IS ABOUT TO JOIN A MOVEMFNT FOR A GREATER TAMIL INDEPENDENT STATE. WHAT IS CLEAR IS THAT HE IS UP TO SOMETHING AND IN THE ABSENCE OF HIS CHIEF CHUM AND ADVISOR, NEPHEW MURASOLI MARAN, IS CONFIDING IN NO ONE.